

Yanyuwa language

Yanyuwa is the language of the Yanyuwa people of the Sir Edward Pellew Group of Islands in the Gulf of Carpentaria outside Borroloola (Yanyuwa: *burrulula*) in the Northern Territory, Australia.

Yanyuwa, like many other Australian Aboriginal languages, is a highly agglutinative language with ergative-absolutive alignment, whose grammar is pervaded by a set of 16 noun classes whose agreements are complicated and numerous.

Yanyuwa is a critically endangered language. The anthropologist John Bradley has worked with the Yanyuwa people for three decades and is also a speaker of Yanyuwa. He has produced a large dictionary and grammar of the language,^[4] along with a cultural atlas in collaboration with a core group of senior men and women.

Contents

Phonology

- Consonants
- Vowels

Morphology

- Noun classes
- Male and female dialects

Speech styles

- Avoidance speech
- Ritual speech
- Island speech

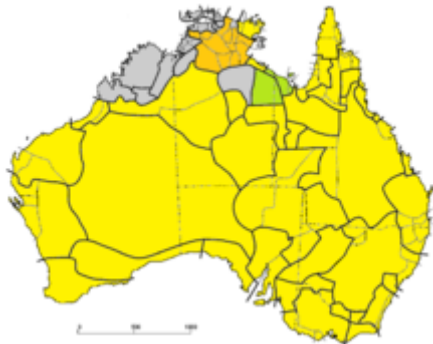
Classification

Culture

- Films
- Music

References

External links

Yanyuwa	
Native to	Australia
Region	Northern Territory
Ethnicity	Yanyuwa, Wadiri
Native speakers	39 (2016 census) ^[1]
Language family	<div>Pama–Nyungan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ngarna<ul style="list-style-type: none">Yanyuwa</div>
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	jao
Glottolog	yany1243 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/yany1243) ^[2]
AIATSIS ^[3]	N153 (https://collection.aiatsis.gov.au/austlang/language/N153)
<div><p>Yanyuwa is the patch of yellow on the northern coast, between the orange and the green.</p></div>	

Phonology

Yanyuwa is extremely unusual in having 7 places of articulation for stops, compared to 3 for English and 4–6 for most other Australian languages.

Consonants

	Peripheral			Laminal		Apical	
	Bilabial	Front velar	Back velar	Palato- alveolar	Dental	Alveolar	Retroflex
Stop	b (b)	ɟ (yk)	ɡ (k)	ɕ (j)	ʈ (th)	d (d)	ɖ (rd)
Prenasalised stop	ᵐb (mb)	ᵑɟ (nyk)	ᵑɡ (ngk)	ᵑɕ (nj)	ᵑʈ (nth)	ᵑd (nd)	ᵑɖ (rnd)
Nasal	m (m)	ɲ (nyng)	ŋ (ng)	ɲ (ny)	ɳ (nh)	n (n)	ɳ (rn)
Lateral				ɭ (ly)	ɭ (lh)	l (l)	ɭ (rl)
Rhotic						r (rr)	ɻ (r)
Semivowel	w (w)			j (y)			

Vowels

	Front	Back
High	i (i)	u (u)
Low	a (a)	

Morphology

Noun classes

Yanyuwa has 16 noun classes, distinguished by prefixes. In some cases, different prefixes are used, depending on whether the speaker is a male or a female.

Yanyuwa Noun Classes

#	prefix	class	example
1	rra-/a-	female (human centred)	rra-bardibardi "old lady"
2	nya- (women's speech) 0- (men's speech)	male (human centred)	(w)nya-malbu (m)malbu "old man"
3	rra-/a-	feminine	a-karnkarnka "white bellied sea eagle"
4	0-	masculine	nangurrbuwala "hill kangaroo"
5	ma-	food (non-meat)	ma-ngakuya "cycad fruit"
6	na-	arboreal	na-wabija "digging stick"
7	narnu-	abstract	narnu-wardi "badness"
8	possessive pronominal prefixes	body parts	nanda-wulaya "her head", (w)niwa-wulaya (m)na-wulaya "his head"
9	0-	familiar kinship	kajaja "father, dad"
10	various pronominal prefixes	formal kinship for close kin	angatharra-wangu "my wife"
11	various pronominal prefixes	formal kinship-grandparent level	karna-marrini "my daughter's child"
12	various pronominal prefixes/suffixes	formal kinship-avoidance	rra-kayibanthayindalu "your daughter in law"
13	rri- dual and li- plural	human group	li-maramaranja "dugong hunters of excellence"
14	rra-/a-, nya-. 0-	personal names	rra-Marrngawi, (w)nya-Lajumba (m)Lajumba
15	rra-/a- / 0-	ceremony names	rra-Kunabibi, Yilayi, rra-Milkathatha
16	0-	place names	Kandanbarrawujbi, Burrulula, Wathangka

Notes:

(w) women's speech, (m) men's speech, 0- no prefix used.

rra- is a more formal female/feminine prefix often used in elicitations, and a- is the informal everyday form. There is only one word in Yanyuwa, rra-ardu "girl", in which the rra- prefix is always used. That distinguishes it from the men's speech form ardu "boy" for which women say nya-ardu.

Male and female dialects

Yanyuwa is unusual among languages of the world in that it has separate dialects for men and for women at the morphological level. The only time that men use the women's dialect is if they are quoting someone of the opposite sex and vice versa. An example of this speech is provided below:

(w) *nya-buyi nya-ardu kiwa-wingka waykaliya wulangindu kanyilu-kala nyikunya-baba.*

(m) *buyi ardu ka-wingka waykaliya wulangindu kila-kala nyiku-baba.*

The little boy went down to the river and saw his brother.

The BBC reported in 2018 that there were 3 fluent female speakers worldwide.^[5]

Speech styles

In Yanyuwa, certain words have synonyms used to replace the everyday term in certain cultural situations.

Avoidance speech

Avoidance speech is speech style used when talking to or near certain relatives: one's siblings and cousins of the opposite sex, one's brother-in-law, sister-in-law, father-in-law and mother-in-law, and one's nieces and nephews if their father (for male speakers) or their mother (for female speakers) has died. Occasionally, avoidance speech takes the form of different affixes to usual speech, but generally, it is simply a change in vocabulary.

For example, a digging stick is usually referred to as **na-wabija**, but when talking to one of the above relatives, the word used is **na-wulungkayangu**.

An example of avoidance speech is given below:

Avoidance: *Ja-wuynykurninji ki-bujibujilu runungkawu ma-wulyarri.*

Normal: *Ja-wingkayi ki-buyukalu wubanthawu ma-ngarra.*

He is going to the fire to cook food.

Ritual speech

Another set of vocabulary is used during ceremonies and other ritual occasions. Many of the words used in ritual speech are sacred and kept secret.

For example, a dingo is usually referred to as **wardali**, but during ritual occasions, the word used is **yarrarriwira**. That is one ritual term which is known to the general public, as are some other terms for flora and fauna.

Island speech

When on the Sir Edward Pellew Group of Islands, which is part of Yanyuwa territory, another set of vocabulary may be used to replace the terms used when on the mainland. There is more variance about the usage of island speech than the other speech styles.

For example, on the mainland, fishing is referred to as *wardjangkayarra*, but on the islands, the word used is *akarimantharra*.

Classification

Dixon (2002), who rejects the validity of Pama–Nyungan, accepts that Yanyuwa is demonstrably related to Warluwara and languages closely related to it.

Culture

Films

Yanyuwa-speakers have actively engaged in making a number of films, and more recently have begun a project to animate important stories and songlines. These include three important films, all of which have extensive narratives in Yanyuwa, with subtitles:

- *Kanymarda Yuwa – Two Laws*,
- *Buwarra Akarriya – Journey East*,
- *Ka-wayawayama – Aeroplane Dance*.

Music

Singer Shellie Morris released in May 2013 a song album *Ngambala Wiji Li-Wunungu – Together We are Strong*, with songs in Yanyuwa.^{[6][7]}

References

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3. N153 (<https://collection.aiatsis.gov.au/austlang/language/N153>) Yanyuwa at the Australian Indigenous Languages Database, [Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies](#)
4. Bradley, John (with Yanyuwa families). 2016. *Wuka nya-nganunga li-Yanyuwa li-Anthawirriyarra – Language for Us, The Yanyuwa Saltwater People*. Australian Scholarly Publishing. ISBN 978-1925003673.
5. Kenyon, Georgina (30 April 2018). "Australia's ancient language shaped by sharks" (<http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20180429-australias-ancient-language-shaped-by-sharks>). BBC News. Retrieved 1 May 2018.
6. Music from home – Shellie Morris and the Borroloola Songwomen (<http://blogs.abc.net.au/queensland/2013/05/music-from-home-shellie-morris-and-the-borroloola-songwomen-.html>) (91.7 ABC Coast FM programme).
7. CD Launch "Ngambala Wiji Li-Wunungu — Together We are Strong" (<http://www.waralungku.com/news/cd-launch-ngambala-wiji-li-wunungu-together-we-are-strong>).

External links

- Yanyuwa recordings (<http://phonetics.ucla.edu/appendix/languages/yanuya/yanyuwa.html>) demonstrating the seven POAs.
- Yanyuwa Wuka: Language from Yanyuwa Country – a Yanyuwa Dictionary and Cultural Resource (<https://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:11306>)

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